DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 854 HE 017 539

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TITLE Academic Standards and the Student-Athlete.
PUB DATE 24 Oct 83
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Forum of the College Board (Dallas, TX, October 24, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Standards; Accreditation (Institutions); Accrediting Agencies; Aptitude Tests; *Athletes; Athletics; Black Students; *College Students; *Eligibility; Grade Point Average; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; Remedial Programs; Scores
IDENTIFIERS *College Athletics; *National Collegiate Athletic Association

ABSTRACT

Grade regulations/academic standards for new college athletes are discussed by the president of Tennessee State University, based on the objectives of Proposition 48, which was adopted in 1982 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). The proposition applies to Division 1 schools and would require that academically high-risk students demonstrate satisfactory academic progress before attaining athletic eligibility. The proposition is evaluated from three points of view: (1) the expectation of the student-athletes and of the institutions that recruit them, (2) the enforceability of current academic standards and their effects on different student populations, and (3) the prescription for providing leadership to produce fair and effective standards in the future. Current eligibility rules require entering athletes to have a 2.00 average from high school on a 4.00 scale. The new requirements will add a combined verbal and mathematic scholastic aptitude test score of 700, or a 15 composite American College Testing score and a 2.00 average in 11 academic high school courses. Five criticisms of the proposition are discussed, along with a proposal to allocate 74 million dollars for academic support programs at the 277 Division I colleges. A unique feature of this proposal is to have vested with the NCAA an academic accreditation component. (SW)

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

BY

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PRESENTED AT THE COLLEGE BOARD

ANNUAL FORUM

DALLAS, TEXAS

OCTOBER 24, 1983

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

by

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TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 24, 1983

The adoption of Proposition 48 at the National Collegiate Association in San Diego, California, in December 1982, has generated a lively controversy centered around the rights of student-athletes to a quality education and the responsibility of Division I institutions to provide that education. This panel of College Board 1983 National Forum has been invited to evaluate this proposition from three distinctive points of view (1) the expectation of the student-athletes and of the institutions that recruit them, (2) the enforceability of current academic standards and their effects on different student populations, and (3) the prescription for providing leadership to produce fair and effective standards in the future.

THE QUESTION OR PROPOSITION 48

At present, the National Collegiate Athletic Association eligibility rules require entering athletes to have a 2.00 average from high school on a 4.00 scale. The new requirements will add a combined verbal and mathematic scholastic aptitude test score of 700 or a 15 composite American College Testing score and a 2.00 average in eleven academic courses in high school. This rule would be limited to Division I schools and becomes effective August 1, 1986.

The motion was proposed by the American Council on Education's (ACE) Ad Hoc Committee on Athletics, which consisted of thirty-seven chief executives of Division I institutions. The stated purpose is to "require that academically high risk students demonstrate satisfactory academic progress before attaining athletic eligibility. A student-athlete failing to meet the initial eligibility standards could be admitted to the institution and have four seasons of eligibility if he or she met the 'satisfactory progress' standards in the first year." The ACE also proposed motion 51, which is essentially the same as Proposition 48 except it does not include minimum standardized test scores for initial eligibility. Of the 277 institutions that make up Division I, 16 are Black. The NCAA offer to exempt Black schools from Proposition 48 was quickly rejected by the presidents of these institutions since the adoption of the proposal would have committed all institutions to adhere to its provisions.

While it is widely known that the Presidents and Chancellors of historically Black institutions vehemently opposed Proposition 48, there are several suppositions that constituted the basis of that opposition.

First, Proposition 48 blames the victim. If, as Coach Joe Paterno has stated, "colleges and universities have raped the Black athlete over the last fifteen years," can be taken to have a measure of validity, then it would appear that the rapers must demonstrate their ability to cease the practice of raping. This requires legislation that would make requirements on the institutions and the management of the institutions. Proposition 48 proposes requirements for the

athletes (those raped) and not the institutions (the rapers).

Second, the test scores established by the Proposition excludes a disproportionate number of Black athletes from first-year eligibility. Fifty-five percent of the Black males who take the SAT score below 700 and seventy percent score below 15 on the ACT. For most of the institutions represented on the ACE Ad Hoc Committee, the test scores established by Proposition 48 are inadequate to assure an academically competitive student with other students of these universities. For example, the average Freshman SAT score at UCLA. Notre Dame, and Boston College are respectively, 1044, 1055, and 1065.

These facts raise the question of what is the real intent of Proposition 48.

Third, most of the universities represented on the Ad Hoc Committee are members of intercollegiate athletic conferences. Any conference or an individual institution has the ability to set standards for athletic eligibility beyond the minimum eligibility standards specified by the NCAA. Why is this not occurring? Higher education institutions represents a most broad range of admission requirements. They do not pretend that they are equal in the type of institutions they are or in the type of students they admit. Why, then, do they insist in Proposition 48 that all Division I institutions meet the same requirements?

Fourth, there is the real question as to whether the NCAA is the appropriate forum to establish academic eligibility standards for students at individual institutions. Presidents and other chief

executives, among their many and varied leadership roles, do have the responsibility for educational leadership; but the appropriate forum is the educational forum and not the athletic forum. It is much more appropriate and befitting our leadership roles not to single out athletics, but to focus on the whole educational inadequacy all of us participate in each day. The core curriculum spelled out in Proposition 48 is good for all students and that is where our push ought to be.

As a group, we feel vindicated by the recent publications of "Nation at Risk," the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and Educating Americans for the 21st Century: A Plan of Action for Improving Mathematics, Science, and Technology for all American Elementary and Secondary Students so that Their Achievement is the Best in the World by 1995 by the National Science Board Commission on Pre-collegiate Education in Mathematics, Science, and Technology. These tell of the educational neglect that is occurring in the secondary schools of our nation. They call upon the educational leadership of our universities, the American public, school personnel, and others to make changes in the required curriculum, faculty compensation, time spent in learning and teaching, and for greater parent and citizen involvement. The academic preparation of athletes is but a microcosm of the education problem in our nation. Consequently, if we solve the education problem, we solve the problem of the academic preparation of our athletes. We submit that we ought to direct our attention toward sound academic preparation for all of our students.

Fifth, the motives of the Ad Hoc Committee in proposing Proposition 48 are suspect. There is a scenario that is important to know. At the NCAA Convention held in St. Louis in 1976, the Proposition to share television revenue among all NCAA institutions was defeated.

Reorganization became an important issue in Division I football. The large and powerful schools in that Division felt compelled to serve their needs in football by dividing it into Division I-A and I-AA--the haves and the have nots--the powerful and the powerless.

Division I-A schools were not happy with the television share in Division I, I-A, and I-AA. The powers of Division I-A formed their own association, the College Football Association, and threatened to leave the NCAA unless a more favorable television response was given them. The NCAA acquiesced. Division I-A essentially controls and receives all of the television revenue from CBS, ABC, AND WTBS. At our last convention, the governance package gave fifty percent representation on NCAA Council to Division I-A universities, a clear demarcation from the democratic representation of the composition of the NCAA. It is only after all of these changes were made that the question of academic requirements for athletic eligibility occurred. But the problem of the athlete's academic performance has been there for years as Joe Paterno professes and as news media and investigations of the NCAA have shown. It is an interesting observation that academic eligibility became a priority only after

the Division I-A schools had secured all of the television revenue and control of the NCAA. It is also interesting to note that now that basketball is the object of generous television support that one is now proposing a separation of Division I basketball colleges and universities into Divisions I-A and I-AA like football.

The student athlete expects an education from an institution of higher education, along with the opportunity to compete in inter-collegiate athletics. Some athletes also expect that their successful participation in athletics will lead to a career in professional athletics after their years of college eligibility. I believe that it is fair for the institution to expect the athlete to be educable and to make an honest effort at being a successful student. Because the participation in athletics require much time in the season of competition to field good teams, at levels presently exhibited by collegiate teams, I do not believe it unfair to expect the institution to provide measures of academic support to insure the successful completion of the opportunity to be educated.

To be educable is a matter of relativity in higher education. The Universities and colleges of Division I are not monolithic in their nature, function, and products. Rather, they are very diverse and pride themselves on the unique contribution they make to educating the diverse American student who graduate from the varied and diverse high schools throughout America. High school graduates reflect the quality of several complex, interrelated experiences, among which are the quality of the high school from which they graduate, their socio-economic status, cultural experiences, etc. Their grades, therefore, reflect the interplay of these

experiences as well as their own individual effort. A "B" average in Tennessee may not be a "B" average in Ohio. Grades are relative. A "B" average in Tennessee may not provide a SAT score of 700, while a "B" average may provide a SAT score of 700 in Ohio. A public institution of higher education in Tennessee would be hard pressed not to admit a "B" average student to its freshman class. The point to be made is that for a student to be considered educable is a very diverse proposition for the very diverse and different institutions in higher education. What academic integrity demands on the part of the institution is that they do not recruit athletes inconsistent with the notion of what is educable at their institution or recruit student-athletes inconsistent with what they know are the requirements of their institution. The proposition of individual college admission standards is the crux of the problem. Proposition 48 does not address this issue at all.

What student-athletes ought to expect from us is honesty in our evaluation of their opportunity to be educated at our institution when we recruit them; and what we ought to insist on is for our institutions to recruit athletes who have the same promise of graduation as all other admitted students to our institutions.

As long as this is not fairly faced by the institution of higher education, we will always be begging the issue of eligibility requirements.

A Modest Proposal --

Television will generate revenue this year of approximately 74 million dollars to the NCAA, the institutions of Division I-A, and

their conferences. These dollars represent a magnificient opportunity to level a smashing blow for the consummation of our new-found dedication to find successful formuli to make the "student" in the "student-athlete" term significant and to reflect the seriousness of our pronouncement to have an increasing number of student-athletes graduate from our colleges. I propose that the 74 million dollars be allocated to provide for the establishment of first rate academic support programs at each of the 277 Division I colleges and universities. Each program would be funded to assure that academic counselors and tutors would be made available to assist athletes in being successful in their educational programs. An important responsibility will be the documentation of the success of each school in graduating their athletes and the development of policy and procedures which would insure that academics wins out over athletics in commanding the time of the student-athlete. The funded academic unit would have a direct responsibility to report to the President of each University and the NCAA the results of its efforts and recommendations to improve the academic participation and success of athletes.

A unique feature of this proposal is to have vested with the NCAA an academic accreditation component. The academic accreditation unit, funded with TV money, would be responsible with athletics and academic personnel of the universities and colleges to develop standards for the operation of the athletic program at a university which places emphasis on academic achievement of its student-athletes. The academic unit would then accredit such program according to the agreed upon

standards. Where universities are noted to be deficient, they will be given appropriate time to correct the problems. The ultimate consequences of disaccreditation and public explusion will occur if the deficiencies are not corrected.

What this proposal will achieve, if effectuated, is the complete faith of the public and will indicate that we are serious about the priority of academics in athletics in our institutions. It would require a modest reduction in many of the major college program budgets, but it is certainly a reduction that their athletic budgets can withstand. It is certainly a price that one ought to be willing to pay to insure a greater opportunity and results of success for the student-athletes in our universities and colleges.

Proposition 48 has been bandied about. Objections to it by my colleagues in the historical Black Colleges have been often taken to mean, quite superficially, that we do not have faith in the academic ability of the Black athlete. Much to the contrary, we do. I trust that the comments in this paper present some of the substantial problems we have both with the requirements of Proposition 48 and the motives of the proposers.

The National Association for Equal Opportunity, the organization of the historical Black colleges and universities, shares the viewpoint that we must begin the job to better prepare the student-athlete. Therefore, we have communicated to ACE our proposal to require 2.0 averages on a 4-point scale in 12 specified academic courses to be academically eligible to participate in athletic competition in the first year of college. To this group, we pledge to continue to provide

vigilant leadership to increase academic preparation for all students and commit ourselves to achieve purposeful policy and procedures which represent real measures for increased success in graduating student-athletes.